

Service Recovery Strategies and Procedural Effectiveness: An Analysis of Guest Complaint Handling at Eastin Ashta Resort Cangu

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Submission History:

Submitted: April 15th, 2026

Revised: May 8th, 2026

Accepted: May 20th, 2026

Available Online: June 6th, 2026



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Abstract

Guest complaint handling is a critical aspect of hotel service management because it directly affects service quality, guest satisfaction, and the overall image of the hotel. Although complaint-handling models have been widely discussed in hospitality studies, discrepancies often remain between theoretical procedures and their implementation in daily front office operations, particularly in dealing with language barriers, limited staff authority, and diverse guest characteristics. As Cangu has emerged as a highly competitive and fast-paced international tourism destination, the urgency for flawless service recovery has become paramount for resort sustainability. This study aims to analyze the procedure of handling guest complaints, identify the constraints faced by front office staff, and examine the efforts made to overcome these constraints at Eastin Ashta Resort Cangu. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving the Assistant Front Office Manager, Front Office Supervisor, and Front Office Staff. The findings reveal that guest complaints at the Front Office Department are handled systematically through the LEAST method, namely Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Solve, and Thank, followed by follow-up actions. However, the implementation still faces several s, including language barriers with Korean guests, limited authority in making compensation decisions, and differences in guest character. To address these challenges, the hotel applies translation technology, simple English communication, limited staff empowerment, and monthly front office meetings for evaluation and service improvement. In conclusion,

effective complaint handling requires not only standard procedures but also adaptive communication, coordination, and continuous service evaluation to maintain guest satisfaction.

Keywords: Guest Complaint, Front Office, LEAST Method, Service Quality, Guest Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry is highly dependent on service quality because guest experience is shaped not only by physical facilities but also by the hotel's ability to respond to service failures (Khan & Khan, 2025). In this context, guest complaints are an important indicator of the gap between guest expectations and actual service performance (Jain et al., 2023). If complaints are handled effectively, they can become opportunities to restore guest trust, improve satisfaction, and strengthen the hotel's image (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2020). On the other hand, poor complaint handling may lead to negative impressions, repeated dissatisfaction, and lower service credibility. (Jawabreh et al., 2022; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017) As the first and last point of contact with guests, the Front Office Department plays a strategic role in managing complaints and maintaining service quality in hotel operations .

Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu, a four-star hotel in Bali, provides an appropriate context for examining this issue because guest complaints remain part of its daily operations. Internal complaint data cited in this study show that the Front Office Department recorded guest complaints in 2024 and in 2025, as presented in Figure 1.

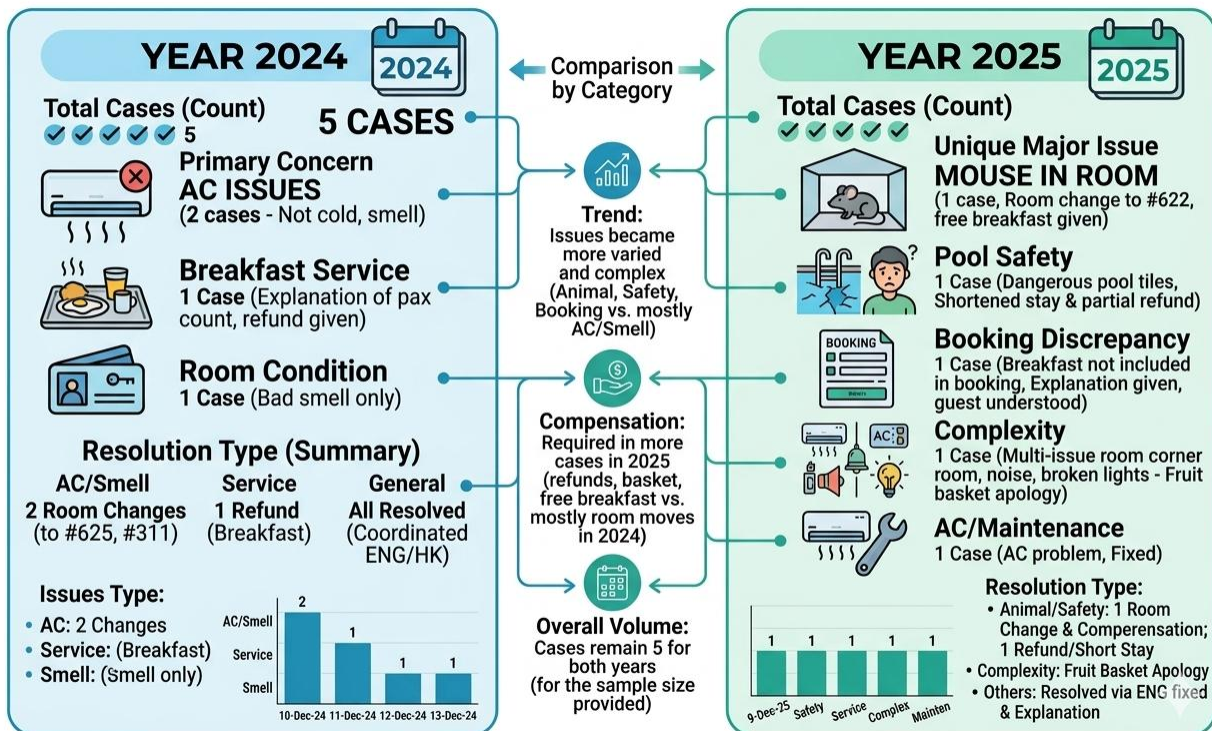


Figure 1. Guest Expectation Report 2024 vs 2025

Source: Eastin Ashta Resort Canggü, 2026

Figure 1 shows a comparative infographic of the Guest Expectation Reports for 2024 and 2025 further illustrates the operational pattern of complaints handled by the Front Office Department. The infographic shows that although the sample volume in both years remains the same at five reported cases, the nature of complaints differs across the two periods. In 2024, complaints were dominated by room-related operational issues, particularly air-conditioning problems, room odor, and one breakfast service discrepancy, with most cases resolved through room changes, engineering or housekeeping coordination, and one breakfast refund. In contrast, the 2025 cases appear more varied and complex, including a mouse in the room, pool safety concerns, booking discrepancy, multi-issue room problems, and air-conditioning maintenance. The infographic also indicates that complaint resolution in 2025 involved more diverse forms of compensation, such as room changes, refunds, shortened stays, complimentary breakfast, and apology gestures, whereas the 2024 cases were resolved more through operational correction and relocation. This comparison suggests that guest complaints at the hotel are not only recurrent service incidents but also reflect changing service challenges that require adaptive communication, coordination, and service recovery strategies from front office staff.

The data indicate that complaint handling remains an important operational concern, especially during periods of high occupancy and in cases involving room facilities, noise, communication problems, and guest expectations. These conditions demonstrate that complaint management is not only a reactive process but also an essential component of service improvement and guest satisfaction management .

Previous studies have shown that complaint handling in hotel front office operations generally involves listening carefully, showing empathy, apologizing, coordinating with relevant departments, and providing appropriate solutions (Kim & So, 2023; Hedy Wartana, 2024). Prior research also confirms that effective complaint handling contributes to guest satisfaction and loyalty (Cheng et al., 2019; Sannindra et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2023). However, earlier studies mainly emphasize procedural descriptions or specific operational stages, while limited attention has been given to how complaint-handling procedures are implemented in actual hotel settings when staff face practical barriers such as language differences, limited authority in compensation decisions, and varied guest personalities (Lajante & Remisch, 2023; Stokburger-Sauer & Hofmann, 2023; Rinayanthi, 2023). In the case of Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu, these challenges are particularly relevant because many guests are from South Korea, requiring staff to adapt their communication and response strategies in real service encounters .

This study addresses that practical gap by focusing on three critical questions: how guest complaints are handled by the Front Office Department, what obstacles are encountered by front office staff, and what efforts are made to overcome these obstacles in order to maintain service quality and guest satisfaction. The study is significant because it does not merely describe complaint handling as a formal procedure, but examines how the procedure operates under real operational constraints. This makes the study relevant to hospitality practitioners, especially front office managers and supervisors, who need service recovery strategies that are both standardized and adaptable .

Guest complaint handling in the hotel industry can be understood as a central component of service recovery, because complaints represent moments when the service experienced by guests falls short of their expectations and therefore threatens satisfaction, trust, and future loyalty. In hospitality, service failures are especially critical because hotel products are highly experiential, interactional, and perishable; the guest often evaluates the service not only by the physical outcome, but by the way the hotel responds when problems occur (Kim & So, 2023; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). For this reason, complaint handling should not be viewed simply as an operational necessity, but as a strategic process through which

hotels restore service quality and protect the continuity of guest relationships. Service recovery literature consistently shows that effective handling of complaints contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty when guests perceive the hotel's response as responsive, fair, empathetic, and professionally managed (Cheng et al., 2019). In frontline hospitality settings, these responses are closely connected to broader dimensions of service quality, since a guest's perception of hotel quality is shaped not only by facilities and technical performance, but also by how staff manage interruptions, discomfort, and dissatisfaction (Hedy Wartana, 2024; Sannindra et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2023). This makes complaint handling especially important in front office operations, where staff function as the first and most visible representatives of the hotel. Front office service is therefore not only administrative, but deeply relational, because it involves listening, responding, reassuring, coordinating, and maintaining emotional control in moments that may determine the guest's overall impression of the property (Jawabreh et al., 2022; Reindrawati et al., 2014). In this context, the present study draws on the interconnected concepts of complaint handling, service quality, and front office operations, because they collectively explain how hotels attempt to preserve the guest experience when service breakdowns occur (Hu et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, complaint handling at the front office involves both procedural and interpersonal dimensions. Procedurally, complaints require a sequence of actions that enables staff to receive the complaint, identify the source of the problem, coordinate corrective action, and ensure that the issue has been resolved. Interpersonally, however, complaint handling also requires emotional intelligence, communication skill, and contextual judgment, because guests do not respond only to the technical outcome of the service encounter but also to the manner in which recovery is delivered. Recent hospitality research has emphasized that frontline service performance is strongly shaped by employee communication, empathy, and the ability to maintain composure in emotionally charged encounters (Lajante & Remisch, 2023; Stokburger-Sauer & Hofmann, 2023). Hu et al. (2022) further show that hotel frontline employees are evaluated through the roles they perform in direct guest contact, meaning that responsiveness, clarity, and interpersonal conduct become central indicators of service quality in the eyes of guests. Similarly, Lin et al. (2021) argue that internal service quality and service climate influence frontline employees' service-oriented behavior, suggesting that complaint handling quality depends not only on individual skill but also on organizational support and internal coordination. In practical terms, these theoretical perspectives help explain why complaint handling models

commonly include elements such as listening, empathy, apology, and corrective action. At the research site, these principles are reflected in the LEAST method—Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Solve, and Thank—followed by follow-up actions, which corresponds closely to the logic of front office complaint handling described by Reindrawati et al. (2014). The significance of such a model lies in the fact that it does not treat complaints merely as disruptions to be ended quickly, but as service encounters that must be managed carefully in order to restore confidence and preserve perceived service value. This is especially relevant in today's hospitality environment, where guests increasingly compare service experiences across brands, are influenced by digital review culture, and expect immediate, personalized, and even technology-supported responses from service providers (Jain et al., 2023; Khan & Khan, 2025). In broader hospitality terms, the ability to recover from dissatisfaction also contributes to a more authentic and emotionally meaningful guest experience, which can support brand attachment and long-term loyalty (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2020).

Empirically, previous studies have established that complaint handling contributes positively to satisfaction, service quality, and loyalty in hotel settings, but much of this literature has focused either on the general importance of service recovery or on broad service quality relationships rather than on the actual implementation of complaint-handling procedures under daily operational constraints. Cheng et al. (2019), for example, demonstrate that service recovery affects customer satisfaction and loyalty, while studies such as Sannindra et al. (2022), Saputra et al. (2023), and Hedy Wartana (2024) confirm that service quality remains a key predictor of positive guest evaluation in hotel contexts. Other studies highlight that front office communication skill is crucial to guest satisfaction and that frontline employees play a decisive role in shaping service impressions through direct interaction (Jawabreh et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2022). In addition, review-based studies indicate that online evaluations increasingly reflect how guests perceive staff performance, hotel responsiveness, and service credibility, making complaint handling relevant not only to immediate satisfaction but also to broader reputational outcomes (Rinayanthi, 2023). Nevertheless, a more specific gap remains in the literature. Existing studies tend to discuss complaint handling through procedural ideals or outcome-based relationships, while less attention has been paid to how these procedures function in real hotel environments where frontline employees face practical barriers such as language differences, limited authority in compensation decisions, and varied guest personalities. This gap is important because the success of complaint handling depends not only on what the hotel intends to do procedurally,

but also on whether frontline staff can implement those procedures under actual operational pressure. The present study addresses that gap by examining how the LEAST-based complaint-handling procedure is practiced at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu through a descriptive qualitative approach using observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving the Assistant Front Office Manager, Front Office Supervisor, and Front Office Staff. This methodological choice is appropriate because qualitative research is particularly useful for understanding how service processes are experienced, interpreted, and enacted in context rather than merely measured as abstract variables (Fadli, 2021; Hutter et al., 2020; Sugiyono, 2019; Wisnawa & Oktaviani, 2024). The findings indicate that complaint handling at the resort has been conducted systematically through the LEAST approach, yet its implementation remains constrained by language barriers, limited staff authority, and differences in guest character. To deal with these issues, the hotel relies on translation technology, simple English communication, limited empowerment, and monthly front office meetings as evaluation and learning forums. Thus, the present study contributes to previous hospitality research by showing that complaint handling effectiveness is not determined by procedure alone, but by the interaction between frontline competence, internal support, and adaptive service practice in the operational setting.

Therefore, this study contributes to the hospitality field by demonstrating that effective guest complaint handling requires more than procedural compliance. It also requires adaptive communication, responsive coordination, and continuous evaluation in order to transform guest complaints into opportunities for service recovery and service quality improvement. At the same time, the study opens further discussion on how front office teams in hotels with international guest markets can strengthen complaint-handling competence in multilingual and high-pressure service environments.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2019) to examine the handling of guest complaints at the Front Office Department of Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu. The study was conducted from December 2025 to March 2026 at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu, located in Canggu, North Kuta, Badung, Bali. The qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of complaint-handling procedures, operational constraints, and the efforts made by front office staff to resolve

guest complaints in real service situations rather than to measure variables statistically (Hutter et al., 2020) .

The research participants of the study consisted of personnel directly involved in guest complaint handling at the Front Office Department. Informants were selected using purposive sampling because the study required participants who had direct knowledge, authority, and operational experience related to the research topic (Wisnawa & Oktaviani, 2024). The selected informants were the Assistant Front Office Manager, Front Office Supervisor, and Front Office Staff. These informants represented different operational levels, allowing the researcher to obtain more comprehensive data regarding complaint-handling procedures, barriers, and service recovery efforts .

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from direct observation and semi-structured interviews with the selected informants (Sugiyono, 2019). Secondary data were collected from hotel documents, including complaint records, guest expectation reports, and standard operating procedures related to complaint handling (Hutter et al., 2020). The instruments used in this study consisted of an interview guide, an observation checklist, and documentation notes. The interview guide was designed to explore the implementation of complaint-handling procedures, constraints faced by staff, and efforts taken to overcome these constraints. The observation checklist was used to record staff behavior, responsiveness, communication style, and the actual flow of complaint handling in the front office area. Documentation notes were used to identify recurring complaint patterns, types of complaints, and supporting evidence from hotel records .

Data were collected through three techniques (Fadli, 2021; Digdowiseiso, 2017). First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three key informants to obtain detailed and flexible explanations while still following the prepared research questions. Second, passive participatory observation was carried out in the Front Office area, where the researcher observed complaint-handling activities without directly intervening in the service process. Third, documentation was collected from official hotel records to support and verify the findings from interviews and observation. The combination of these techniques allowed the researcher to understand both the formal procedure and the actual implementation of guest complaint handling in operational practice .

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative analysis. The researcher organized, reduced, classified, and interpreted the data obtained from interviews, observation, and documentation in order to identify patterns related to complaint-handling procedures, operational barriers, and problem-solving efforts (Hutter et al., 2020). The

findings were then presented narratively to explain the implementation of the LEAST method and its supporting follow-up actions in handling guest complaints. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data were cross-checked through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from different informants and different methods of data collection. This approach helped ensure that the interpretations were based on consistent evidence rather than on a single source of information .

The scope of this study was limited to the Front Office Department of one hotel and focused specifically on guest complaint handling during the research period. Therefore, the findings are context-specific and are intended to provide practical insight into front office complaint-handling practices rather than broad generalization to all hotel settings. Nevertheless, the methodological design provides sufficient procedural detail for similar studies to be conducted in other hospitality contexts with comparable operational characteristics.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the handling of guest complaints at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu is executed through a structured strategic approach. Primary data analysis reveals that the Front Office team consistently implements the LEAST method (Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Solve, and Thank) as the core procedural framework to ensure effective service recovery and maintain guest satisfaction. Based on data collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation, the findings show that complaint handling at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu is not merely a routine operational response, but a service recovery practice shaped by frontline interaction, organizational support, and situational adaptation. In line with the qualitative approach adopted in this study, the discussion interprets the findings contextually by linking them with relevant theories and previous studies on complaint handling, service recovery, front office performance, and service quality in hospitality settings (Fadli, 2021; Hutter et al., 2020; Kim & So, 2023; Reindrawati et al., 2014). This makes it possible to explain not only what happens in practice, but also why the complaint-handling process takes its particular form in the operational context of the hotel.

How Guest Complaints Are Handled by the Front Office Department

The first major finding of this study is that guest complaints at the Front Office Department of Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu are handled through a structured and operationally consistent procedure based on the LEAST method, namely Listen, Empathize,

Apologize, Solve, and Thank, followed by follow-up actions and documentation. This finding directly answers the first research question and supports the argument developed in the Introduction that complaint handling in hotel operations should be understood not merely as a reactive response to dissatisfaction, but as an integral part of service recovery and service quality management (Kim & So, 2023; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). At the research site, complaint handling is not performed informally or solely based on individual staff discretion. Instead, it has been institutionalized as a practical front office procedure that guides staff in responding to guest dissatisfaction in a professional and orderly manner, which is consistent with the strategic role of front office staff as the first point of service contact and a key determinant of guest perception toward hotel service quality (Reindrawati et al., 2014; Jawabreh et al., 2022).

Based on interviews, observation, and supporting documents, the complaint-handling process begins with attentive listening. *"Listening is the most crucial part because we need to let the guest vent their frustration completely. If we interrupt, they get angrier. Once they feel heard, it's much easier for us to move to the next step, like offering a sincere apology and finding a solution that they will actually accept."* (Informant 3, Front Office Staff). Front office staff are expected to allow guests to explain the problem completely, without interruption, while showing active attention through eye contact, polite body language, and a calm response. This stage is significant because it determines whether the staff can correctly identify the core issue before taking action. The next stage is empathy, in which staff are required to acknowledge the guest's discomfort and communicate sincere concern. This is followed by apology, which functions not simply as a formal expression of regret, but as an interactional strategy to reduce tension and restore the guest's confidence in the hotel. After that, staff move to the solving stage by either handling the matter directly or coordinating with relevant departments such as housekeeping, engineering, or supervisory personnel. The process is completed by thanking the guest for the complaint and conducting follow-up to ensure that the solution provided has actually resolved the problem. This sequence is in line with the broader hospitality service recovery literature, which emphasizes that effective recovery depends on attentive frontline interaction, empathy, emotional management, and fair corrective action rather than on technical repair alone (Lajante & Remisch, 2023; Stokburger-Sauer & Hofmann, 2023; Cheng et al., 2019).

This procedural pattern is important because it shows that complaint handling at the front office is both technical and relational. On the one hand, staff are required to identify the source of the problem and arrange corrective action quickly. On the other hand, they must

also manage the emotional dimension of the guest experience through empathy, apology, and reassurance. In this sense, the findings support the view that service recovery in hospitality involves more than correcting operational errors; it also includes rebuilding trust after service disruption and protecting the guest's post-service evaluation of the hotel (Kim & So, 2023; Cheng et al., 2019). This is also relevant to previous findings that guest satisfaction and loyalty in hospitality are strongly influenced by perceived service quality and the way service encounters are managed by frontline staff (Sannindra et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2023; Hedy Wartana, 2024). In other words, the effectiveness of complaint handling should be interpreted not only from the speed of problem resolution, but also from its contribution to maintaining service consistency, trust, and the likelihood of repeat patronage.

Another important aspect revealed by the data is the role of documentation in making the procedure systematic. Complaint cases are not considered finished once a verbal solution has been delivered. They are recorded in the log book or operational system, including the type of complaint, the departments involved, the action taken, and the final outcome. This documentation function strengthens the reliability of complaint handling because it allows front office staff and supervisors to monitor unresolved issues, avoid repetition, and use past complaints as material for service evaluation. The finding is consistent with studies showing that frontline performance in hotels is increasingly visible through service traces, internal records, and guest feedback, all of which shape service improvement and operational accountability (Hu et al., 2022; Rinayanthi, 2023). Thus, the procedure identified in this study should be understood not only as a sequence of interpersonal actions, but also as a control mechanism that connects frontline service, cross-department coordination, and managerial learning.

The finding also suggests that the LEAST-based procedure practiced at the hotel reflects a wider shift in hospitality toward more adaptive and guest-centered service management. Contemporary hotel operations increasingly require frontline staff to combine interpersonal competence with procedural discipline, especially in environments shaped by international guest expectations, technology-supported communication, and competitive service standards (Jain et al., 2023; Khan & Khan, 2025). In this respect, the inclusion of follow-up and appreciation in the complaint-handling process is especially meaningful because it positions complaints not only as service failures to be corrected, but also as opportunities to preserve authenticity, reinforce brand experience, and protect long-term guest relationships (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2020). Therefore, in relation to the

Introduction, this first finding confirms that complaint handling at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu has already functioned as a structured service recovery practice. However, its effectiveness depends not merely on the existence of the procedure, but on how consistently each stage is implemented in actual operational encounters by front office personnel

What Obstacles Are Encountered by Front Office Staff

The second major finding of this study is that the implementation of complaint handling at the Front Office Department is constrained by three interrelated obstacles, namely language barriers, limited frontline authority in compensation decisions, and differences in guest character. These obstacles directly answer the second research question and support the gap identified in the Introduction, namely that complaint-handling procedures may appear orderly in theory, but their implementation in actual hotel settings is shaped by practical frontline constraints. In the present study, the data from interviews, observation, and documentation consistently show that complaint handling becomes more complex when staff must simultaneously manage the technical problem, the emotional state of the guest, and the operational limits of their role. This interpretation is in line with the qualitative logic of understanding social and service phenomena in context, where meaning is shaped by actual interaction rather than by procedure alone (Fadli, 2021; Hutter et al., 2020; Sugiyono, 2019; Wisnawa & Oktaviani, 2024).

The first and most visible obstacle is language difference, especially because many guests at the hotel are from South Korea while front office staff do not always possess adequate Korean proficiency. *"The biggest challenge is when we have guests from South Korea who don't speak English well. We often have to use translation apps on our phones just to understand if the complaint is about the AC or a room facility. Also, when guests demand a refund, we can't decide it immediately as we have to wait for the manager's approval, which sometimes makes the guest impatient."* (Informant 2, Front Office Supervisor). This condition affects not only the accuracy of communication, but also the speed and emotional quality of complaint handling. When guests explain a problem in a language that staff do not fully understand, the risk of misinterpretation increases, and staff may need more time to identify the core complaint before taking action. As a result, responsiveness may appear slower even when staff are willing to help. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that communication skill is central to front office performance because guests often evaluate service quality through direct interaction with frontline employees (Jawabreh et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2022). In hotel settings, communication is not merely an instrument for transferring information, but a core component of perceived service competence. Therefore,

language barriers in this study should be understood as a structural obstacle to effective service recovery rather than as a simple individual weakness of staff.

The language issue also influences the empathy dimension of service. Empathy is meaningful only when it is perceived by the guest as sincere, understandable, and appropriate to the situation. When linguistic limitations exist, staff may intend to be empathetic but fail to communicate reassurance clearly, especially when the guest is upset or demanding immediate resolution. This finding supports recent hospitality literature emphasizing that frontline empathy plays a decisive role in service recovery because guests respond not only to the outcome of the recovery, but also to how the staff emotionally engages with them during the complaint episode (Lajante & Remisch, 2023; Stokburger-Sauer & Hofmann, 2023). In this regard, the present study shows that language competence and empathy are closely connected: inadequate linguistic capacity can weaken the visible expression of empathy, which in turn can affect guest satisfaction and perceived fairness of the recovery process.

The second obstacle concerns limited authority in making compensation or service recovery decisions. The findings indicate that front office staff are able to perform routine corrective actions, but they cannot independently approve more sensitive decisions such as refunds, major upgrades, or exceptional compensation without managerial consent. From an operational perspective, this limitation is understandable because hotels must maintain control over financial decisions and service standards (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). However, from the guest's perspective, delayed decision making may be interpreted as uncertainty, lack of competence, or insufficient concern, particularly when the complaint occurs in a stressful or urgent situation. This finding is relevant to service recovery theory, which argues that successful recovery depends not only on the fairness of the final outcome, but also on the speed, transparency, and interactional quality of the recovery process (Kim & So, 2023; Cheng et al., 2019). Thus, the issue in this study is not simply that staff have limited authority, but that organizational hierarchy can slow down the visible effectiveness of complaint handling at the point of service encounter.

This obstacle also highlights the close relationship between internal service quality and external service performance. Front office staff operate effectively only when the organizational environment supports timely coordination, clear escalation procedures, and confidence in role boundaries. As Lin et al. (2021) argue, service climate and internal service quality influence frontline employees' service-oriented behavior. The present findings support this view, because the limitation of authority becomes manageable only when staff

can rapidly coordinate with supervisors or other departments. Without such internal support, guests may experience the complaint process as fragmented. Therefore, limited authority should be seen not only as a managerial control issue, but also as a factor affecting assurance, consistency, and service continuity in frontline operations.

The third obstacle identified in this study is the variation in guest character. Not all guests express dissatisfaction in the same way. Some communicate calmly and clearly, while others respond with impatience, high emotion, or culturally shaped expectations of what constitutes acceptable service recovery. This finding is significant because it shows that complaint handling cannot be treated as a fully standardized communication routine. Even when the same procedural steps are followed, the staff must adapt their tone, explanation style, and interpersonal approach according to the guest's emotional condition and behavior. This result is consistent with previous hospitality research showing that guest perceptions of service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty are influenced not only by the service outcome, but also by the quality of the interpersonal encounter and the extent to which the service feels personally meaningful and authentic (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2020; Sannindra et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2023). In this study, varied guest personalities made complaint handling more situational and less mechanical, requiring staff to combine procedural discipline with interpersonal flexibility.

Seen together, these three obstacles demonstrate that complaint handling at the front office is shaped by a combination of communication barriers, organizational boundaries, and interpersonal complexity. This helps explain why earlier procedural models alone are not sufficient to capture the full reality of complaint handling in hotel operations. The present findings move the discussion beyond formal stages by showing that the real challenge lies in implementing these stages under multilingual, emotionally charged, and hierarchically structured service conditions. This is particularly relevant in contemporary hospitality, where guest expectations are increasingly influenced by technology, review culture, personalization, and the broader competitiveness of service experience (Jain et al., 2023; Khan & Khan, 2025; Rinayanthi, 2023). In practical terms, the obstacles identified in this study suggest that service quality at the front office is not threatened only by service failure itself, but also by the difficulty of responding to that failure quickly, clearly, and appropriately under actual operational constraints. Hotels that wish to maintain guest loyalty must therefore recognize that complaint handling effectiveness depends as much on frontline capability and internal support systems as on the formal existence of service procedures (Cheng et al., 2019; Hedy Wartana, 2024).

Efforts Made to Overcome the Obstacles in Order to Maintain Service Quality and Guest Satisfaction

The third major finding of this study is that the Front Office Department at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu does not rely on procedural compliance alone to handle guest complaints, but also implements several adaptive efforts to overcome operational barriers and preserve service quality. These efforts include the use of translation technology, simple English communication, limited frontline empowerment, rapid coordination with supervisors and related departments, interpersonal adjustment to guest emotions, and regular evaluation through Front Office Monthly Meetings. This finding directly answers the third research question and confirms the argument stated in the Introduction that effective complaint handling in hotel operations requires not only a formal procedure, but also practical strategies that allow the procedure to function under real service constraints. In qualitative terms, these efforts should be understood as context-based responses developed from everyday interaction and operational experience rather than as abstract policy statements (Fadli, 2021; Hutter et al., 2020; Wisnawa & Oktaviani, 2024).

One important effort concerns the use of communication support to reduce language barriers. Because a considerable number of guests are from South Korea, front office staff use translation applications and the hotel's internal HandiGo system to facilitate message exchange and reduce miscommunication. This is often complemented by the use of simple and direct English so that essential information can still be communicated even when more nuanced explanation is difficult. This effort is important because the findings showed that language barriers affect not only the speed of response but also the staff's ability to express empathy and reassure the guest. The present study therefore supports earlier research suggesting that communication skill is a central component of front office service and guest satisfaction (Jawabreh et al., 2022). At the same time, the use of communication technology reflects the broader movement of hospitality toward smart and technology-enabled service support, where digital tools help frontline employees maintain responsiveness in multilingual service encounters (Khan & Khan, 2025). However, the findings also imply that technology functions best as support rather than replacement, because emotionally sensitive complaint situations still require human judgment, empathy, and situational awareness.

Another effort involves limited empowerment and rapid escalation. Although front office staff cannot independently authorize all forms of compensation, the hotel allows selected actions such as late check-out or room relocation of equivalent type to be handled directly at the frontline level. For issues beyond staff authority, fast coordination with

supervisors or managers on duty is used to prevent guests from feeling ignored. This effort is particularly significant because one of the main operational barriers identified in this study was not simply the existence of hierarchy, but the risk that hierarchy may slow down visible service recovery. By giving staff partial authority while maintaining clear escalation channels, the hotel attempts to balance operational control with service responsiveness. This aligns with service management theory, which emphasizes that successful recovery depends not only on the final solution but also on how quickly and transparently the guest sees corrective action taking place (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017; Kim & So, 2023). It also supports the argument of Cheng et al. (2019) that effective service recovery strengthens customer satisfaction and loyalty when the guest perceives the response as fair and competent. In this study, empowerment is therefore not merely a managerial convenience, but a mechanism for protecting assurance and continuity in the service encounter.

A further effort is the adaptation of interpersonal communication to guest character. The findings show that front office staff do not respond to every complaint in exactly the same interpersonal manner. Instead, they adjust their tone, pace of explanation, and emotional approach depending on whether the guest is calm, frustrated, impatient, or highly emotional. This is an important practical response because varied guest personalities were identified as one of the key barriers in complaint handling. The study thus reinforces the view that complaint handling is not only procedural but deeply relational. Empathy, in particular, must be enacted differently depending on the guest's emotional condition and expectations (Lajante & Remisch, 2023). Likewise, Stokburger-Sauer and Hofmann (2023) show that successful service recovery is shaped by how employee emotions and guest emotions interact during the recovery process. The current findings are consistent with that perspective, since front office staff in this study attempt to calm the guest, avoid defensive reactions, and deliver explanations in a way that preserves dignity and trust. Such adaptive interaction is highly relevant to service quality, because guests often remember the quality of the interpersonal encounter as much as, or even more than, the technical solution itself (Hu et al., 2022; Sannindra et al., 2022).

The hotel also strengthens complaint handling through organizational learning, particularly by conducting Front Office Monthly Meetings. According to the data, these meetings are used as a forum to discuss repeated complaint cases, share staff experiences, evaluate handling strategies, and align service approaches across the team. This effort shows that the hotel treats complaint handling not only as a frontline task but also as a collective learning process. In this respect, the findings support Lin et al. (2021), who argue that

internal service quality and service climate shape service-oriented behavior among hotel frontline employees. The present study demonstrates that regular internal reflection helps strengthen consistency, confidence, and coordination in complaint management. It also extends previous discussions by showing that the maintenance of guest satisfaction depends not only on what individual staff do in the moment, but also on whether the team has a structured opportunity to learn from previous service failures. This learning dimension is especially important in competitive hospitality settings where service quality influences loyalty, review behavior, and future booking intention (Hedy Wartana, 2024; Rinayanthi, 2023).

Taken together, these efforts indicate that maintaining service quality and guest satisfaction requires a combination of communication support, selective empowerment, adaptive interpersonal skill, and internal evaluation. This finding is consistent with previous hospitality studies showing that guest satisfaction is shaped by the interaction between service quality, frontline performance, and perceived responsiveness (Saputra et al., 2023; Sannindra et al., 2022). It also resonates with broader hospitality literature that emphasizes the importance of meaningful and authentic guest experience in building long-term attachment to service brands (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2020). In the context of the present study, the implication is that complaint-handling efforts are valuable not only because they solve immediate service problems, but because they help preserve the overall quality of the guest experience. When guests feel heard, respected, and properly assisted, the complaint episode may no longer function solely as a negative event; instead, it can become part of a recovery process that protects trust in the hotel.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the hotel's response to complaint-handling barriers is practical, layered, and service-oriented. The efforts identified in this study show that maintaining guest satisfaction is not the result of one technique alone, but of a coordinated system in which procedural guidance, communication practice, technological support, managerial responsiveness, and team learning work together. In relation to the Introduction, this finding confirms that complaint handling at Eastin Ashta Resort Canggü is meaningful not because the hotel has a formal method, but because the method is continuously supported by adaptive strategies that allow it to remain effective under real operational pressures (Jain et al., 2023; Kim & So, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Effective guest complaint handling at the Front Office Department of Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu depends not only on the existence of a formal procedure, but also on the staff's ability to apply that procedure adaptively in actual service situations. The implementation of the LEAST method, supported by follow-up and documentation, shows that complaint handling can function as a structured service recovery practice that helps maintain service quality and guest satisfaction. However, the findings also indicate that the success of this process is shaped by practical constraints, particularly language barriers, limited staff authority, and differences in guest character. For this reason, complaint handling in hospitality operations should be understood as a combination of procedural consistency, effective communication, responsive coordination, and continuous team learning. This study is relevant to hospitality practitioners because it demonstrates that guest complaints should not be treated merely as operational problems, but as opportunities to improve service performance and strengthen guest trust. Within a realistic managerial context, the study confirms that standardized complaint-handling models become more meaningful when supported by multilingual communication tools, appropriate frontline empowerment, and regular service evaluation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who contributed to the completion of this study. Special appreciation is addressed to the management and staff of Eastin Ashta Resort Canggu, particularly the Assistant Front Office Manager, Front Office Supervisor, and Front Office Staff, for their cooperation, support, and willingness to provide the data and information required in this research. The author also extends gratitude to the academic supervisors for their valuable guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement throughout the research and writing process. In addition, appreciation is given to Universitas Triatma Mulya for providing academic support that enabled this study to be completed. All contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

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